1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

[p iv contains no textual material]

FOREWORD

THE study of religions can be approached in many different ways and can present a number of different kinds of problems. For social anthropologists, or for some of them, one major problem is that of the social function of religion—how does religion contribute to the existence of society as an ordered and continuing system of relationships amongst human beings? It is recognized that religion is a binding force amongst individuals, and it would seem that the etymology of the word indicates this. The scientific problem is how religion does this; how, in other words, it functions. The problem is one of very considerable complexity, and it cannot be said that at present we know very much about this subject. The only method by which we can hope ultimately to arrive at an understanding of it is by a number of analytic descriptive studies of religions of diverse types, so that by systematic comparison it may be possible to arrive at some general theory. This work of Dr. Srinivas is an important contribution to that investigation. It gives us a description and analysis of the religious practices of a people of India, the Coorgs of Coorg.

For the social anthropologist the religion of a people presents itself in the first instance not as a body of doctrine, but as what we may call 'religious' behaviour as a part of social life. Social anthropology is behaviouristic in the sense that we seek to observe how people act as a necessary preliminary to trying to understand how they think and feel. This book, by a trained anthropologist, who is himself an Indian, and who has therefore an understanding of Indian ways of thought which it is difficult for a European to attain even over many years, gives us a scientifically valuable and objective account of the religious behaviour of a particular Indian community.

In an investigation into the social function of religion in a particular society the first thing required is to examine the relation of the religion to the social structure. In this respect the religion of the Coorgs is of very special interest and value. For we may say that there are three different structural systems in which the individual Coorg is involved, and each of these has its own system of religious behaviour and obligations.

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IV

THE RITUAL IDIOM OF COORGS

(2) THE CONCEPTS OF *POLÉ* AND *MAḌI*

I

THE external world is divided into two parts, the sacred and non-sacred. The term 'sacred' is used in its wider sense as inclusive of 'good-sacredness' as well as 'bad-sacredness'. Good-sacredness includes all forms of ritually desirable states and conditions like auspiciousness and purity, while bad-sacredness includes all forms of ritually undesirable states and conditions such as inauspiciousness and impurity.

The Koḍagi term for ritual purity is *maḍi*, and this term is found in all other Dravidian languages except Malayāḷam; and *polé*, which means ritual impurity, is found in all Dravidian languages except Telugu.

Polé is used in Koḍagi in two senses: one, in which it means ritual impurity generally; and another in which it means certain specific forms of ritual impurity. In the latter cases it is usual to add the necessary prefixes: for instance, *kuruḍu polé* (blind pollution) or *tinga polé* (monthly pollution) refers to the impurity of a woman in her periods, and *petta polé* or *puruḍu*[1] *polé* refers to birth pollution.

The pollution resulting from the death of a person is called *tiké*. *Tiṭ* in Tamil means death-pollution, while *tiṭ* in Koḍagi means faeces. A house in which an adult has died is referred to as *tiké manė* (polluted house) till the end of ritual mourning. On the day ritual mourning ends, in the afternoon, after the mourners have returned from the burial-ground, the family friend says, 'Until now mourning, from now on festival' (*indākaṇé tammé inya pinya nammé*). *Tammé* is used to mean mourning, while *nammé* is used to mean festival.

All over India there is a ban on a member of a higher caste touching, or coming very close to, a member of a lower caste. This

[1] *Puruḍu* which means the pollution consequent on birth occurs in all Dravidian languages excepting Malayāḷam.

1: Srinivas
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[This entire source deals in a general way with the functional interrelationship between religion and social structure.]

[P. 51]

CHAPTER IX

COORG (Contd.)

THE worship of the demons and ancestor-spirits constitutes the religion of the Coorgs. They have been influenced by contact with the Malayali, Canarese, Brahmanical and Lingayat superstitions. The Malayalis have made themselves indispensable at their demon and ancestor worship. The Tulus are their Pujaris. The worship of Mariamman (the smallpox demon) was introduced by the Mysoreans. The domiciled Brahmans of Coorg have succeeded in the introduction of Mahadeva and Subrahmania, and have temples erected and idols set up for worship. The Lingayats or Sivachars are also endeavouring to introduce the worship of Linga. Since the days of Vira Rajendra, Christianity was introduced in Coorg, and there is a Roman Catholic Settlement with a fine church at Virajpet, but Christianity has not made much headway in Coorg.

Ancestor-Worship

The ancestor-worship of the Coorgs is based on the belief that the spirits of the dead hover inside and outside the Coorg dwellings and cause endless trouble in the absence of adequate propitiation. Each Coorg house has a *Kaimatta* (a building close at hand) under a tree in the fields or in the yard close to the house. This is a raised mud platform where carved stones representing the images of their ancestors are placed. Sacrifices of fowls and pigs are made to them. Sometimes the Coorgs become possessed of the spirits of the dead and express all their desires when they are sumptuously fed and given drink. The spirits of ancestors are believed to hand over their locality and become angry now and then. A male ghost is called *Karana*, and a female one *Sodalachi* or *Karanchi*.

It is a belief among the Coorgs that ghosts cause trouble, and females even more so. The Sodalachis are ever inclined to smite children with sickness and sometimes even the adult males and females of the house. In fact they are ever inclined to do harm. With a view to appease their wrath, rice, arrack, milk and other delicacies are offered on various occasions during the year to them. Once a month, a fowl or two are offered at the *Kaimatta* to please them. In such cases a member of the community becomes possessed. He then puts off his head dress and walks in front of the house in a state of trance. While in this condition, the members of the family appear before him to represent their grievances. He makes some incoherent utterances which are believed to be emanations from one of the ancestors who has not been propitiated with offerings. At once he is treated to meat and drink, and neighbours are allowed to come in and put questions to the possessed. These gifts are called *Karana Barana*.

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 AW5 Coorg AW5

During the month of November, a lamp is lighted every evening to Natas, and coconuts are offered as oblations.

Pilgrimage

The Coorgs go on pilgrimage to Irjatre at the foot of Lakshmana-tirtha fall in Kiggatnad after the Sivaratri in February or March, and on the Talai Kaveri Jatra to the source of the river Cauvery in October. Amongst the Jatra beyond their country, those visited by the Coorgs are four, Subramania on the northern frontier of Coorg in December, Baitur in Malabar, in February, and Nanjangudu in Mysore which comes off in December. In exceptional cases they go to Benares.

Demon Worship

The Coorgs are demon worshippers because of the evil influences of certain malignant spirits, which can render their life more gloomy and wretched. The demons are called Kulis, who are believed to be capable of carrying away the souls of the dying members in a family. When any trouble arises in a house, and strange voices are believed to be heard in or near it, a *Kanya* (a Malabar astrologer) is consulted as to the cause of it, and he speaks of the influence of some *Kuli* who must have carried away the soul of somebody either in the house or in the neighbourhood. He suggests that a demon mask has to be performed for the liberation of the soul. It takes place once a year at Kutta, or at any other place once in two or three years.

The master of the house ties some money in a piece of cloth which is suspended from a rafter of the house as a pledge for the performance of the ceremony. Sometimes he ties his brass plate up there and eats his food on a plantain leaf as a vow. For the demon mask, either a Malayali magician or a true Ajjala Palya is sent for, and the ceremony is performed in the courtyard of the house owner. Demon masks are performed in the name of one or two of the five demons, Bhamundi, Kallugutti, Panjurli, Gulika and Goraka. The details of the ceremony are the same as those described for the exorcism of the ancestral spirits. The food of the performer in trance is called Kuli Barani. The liberation of the soul is thus effected. The demon that has thus committed the theft begs to leave the soul free. In the event of his refusal, the performer throws a handful of rice on the member of the house standing near him, and thus transfers the spirit to him. The spirit alights on his back, when he falls in a swoon, and is soon carried away by others into the house. The final act of a demon mark is the decapitation of pigs in front of the so called *kuzhikota* or demon abode. It may be near to or far away from the house or village. Fowls are sacrificed upon it. One pig suffices for house affair, but several pigs are required when a whole village is involved. The heads are given to the performers, and the trunks supply the house or village diviner.

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 AW5 Coorg AW5

824
771
291
782

Tree Worship

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Huttari Festival

[Facing p. 64]

COORG TRIBES AND CASTES

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Disposal of the Dead

The Amma Coorgs used to bury the dead which is now being abandoned. Pollution lasts for ten days.

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Occupation

The Amma Coorgs are agriculturists They do all agricultural operations, ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Both men and women work.

Conclusion

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The Amma Coorgs follow the Coorgs in point of inheritance. They worship the Hindu deities and observe Hindu holidays. They are inferior to the Coorgs in physical appearance and strength of body. They are now trying to improve their condition. They are strict vegetarians. They marry within the same *gotra* This may eventually hasten their extinction.

[P 69 ff. have not been Processed for this file]

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

the house or by a visiting neighbour whether male or female with great respect. The young man lays aside whatever burdens his hands, puts off his shoes and with folded hands first raised to the forehead, bows down and touches the feet of his senior, who lays his hand on the young man's head pronouncing a blessing, when the youth rises and repeats the ceremony to others.

The Coorgs are a hardy race and bear with fortitude a great deal of hardship, especially during the monsoon, whilst engaged with their rice cultivation. Exposed to wet and cold and often prostrate with fever, they soon regain their strength and old men and women of 70 or 80 years are not uncommon amongst them.

In the times of their Rajahs, during their wars with the Mysoreans and Malabars and in their marauding expeditions the Coorgs proved themselves brave soldiers and were dreaded for their fierce intrepidity; but their strength lay especially in their mountain fastnesses and behind the shelter of their native woods and the formidable breastworks extending for miles along the crests of hills. Since they have come under the rule of the British Government their warlike spirit has found no scope; but they are still a brave and manly race, who in time of need would doubtless stand by their new rulers with devoted loyalty. At the hunt of the tiger, the bison or the elephant no true Coorg shirks the dangerous sport; but with nerve and coolness and wary cunning he will dodge the advancing beast and with keen eye and steady hand fire at him at close quarters.

The intellectual and moral faculties of the Coorgs have for ages been neglected, and consequently up to the present day they are both ignorant and superstitious. The worship of demons and of departed spirits has usurped among them the worship of God. Charms and sorceries abound all over the country. Disease among men and cattle is readily ascribed to the Curses and witchcraft of enemies.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

cribed to the curses and witchcrafts of enemies. The dead are supposed to trouble the living and to demand sacrifices and other atonements. Many of the Coorgs, though they may despise their old superstitions and neglect their idols, come to believe in nothing but money. The cruel despotism of their Rajahs engendered dissimulation, falsehood and treachery, and lying and deception, bribery and conspiracy are now often enough practised to ruin an opponent and to advance self-interest. The name of the Coorgs is still feared by their neighbours, who look upon them as proud, irritable and revengeful men, and such popular estimations of the character of a neighbouring race are seldom without some foundation. It still may happen, that the head of a Coorg house on his dying bed will solemnly charge his sons to seek vengeance on his personal enemies, a bequest which occasions calamitous feuds between succeeding generations.

The Coorgs have hitherto been an unlettered people. The Rajahs, themselves without education, did nothing for the instruction of their subjects. Even the English Government has for many years hardly attempted systematically to raise them in intelligence and character. Only lately most praiseworthy efforts have been made to satisfy the awakened popular desire for education in Coorg, and the provisions made have already borne good fruit in supplying Government with a body of well trained officials, though education is still in its first stage of development.

The public morality of the Coorgs is controlled by a council of elders called "Takka-mukyasteru", who are the moral censors and managers of social affairs, without however any magisterial power from Government. This institution dates from the Rajahs' time and is hereditary in certain families. The authority of the village Takkas extends over offences against social customs, attendance at public feasts and proper conduct during the same, drunkenness and adultery.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

On the following morning the youths assemble for a hunt in the forest, belonging to the village. Whatever game is brought down, is divided by the huntsmen in the following manner: the man who has killed the animal, receives a hind-quarter and the head, the rest belongs to the company. This day is followed by a great hunt of the whole Nádu, a repetition of the village-hunt, on a larger scale. The Keilmúrta, to the taste of young Coorg, is the most glorious of all the festivals.

5. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND POPULAR SUPERSTITION.

The previous description of familiar and popular Coorg life would be incomplete without an account of other *religious observances*, if such a name may be given to the lowest degree of superstitions, which take the place of the worship of God among this rude race.

a. The sanctuaries of a Coorg community.

Instead of a general description, a short sketch of the village "Arméri" in Beppunád, the centre of Coorg life, may serve as a specimen.

Arméri numbers only 25 Coorg houses, but is richly provided with idol shrines. First a Bhagavati temple in charge of Brahmans. In connection with this kind of worship there is a Mahádéva temple, and two Lingas in the jungle, which receive regular pûja. Also two sanctuaries of Ayappa (the Shani, Saturn Pán? of Hindu mythology) have Brahmans for priests. Ayappa (Lord) is quite naturalized among the Coorgs. He is the great forest-god, a mighty hunter, to whom models in clay of dogs, horses and tigers are offered in abundance. In these observances the whole community joins under the superintendence of Brahmans. There are besides six places in which Chámundi or Raktéshvari (names for Párvati, Shiva's

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

174 stances, the nucleus of brahminical legends and Coorg traditions.

[101] The name "Coorg", which is a corruption of the native name "Kodagu" needs not the elaborate and forced derivation of the Kávéri-Purána however well it may have served its purpose to mystify the natives. "Kodi" means in the Coorg dialect a top or peak, and Kodagu in Canarese signifies the same, so that "Kodagu" is emphatically the *Mountainous country*.

[197] [791] We have seen that the Coorg language and the ante-brahminical demon- and ancestor-worship are rooted in the Dravidian stock; we need therefore not go beyond the Dravidian family, to seek the origin of the Coorgs. They are certainly not the offspring of the Kshetria Pándus, as some brahminised Coorgs would have it, for the Pándus had perished in the snows of the Himalayas centuries before the Coorgs through the Mahá Bhárata even heard of their existence. It is however not unlikely, that the Coorgs were somehow connected with the Pándya kingdom which flourished in the south of India perhaps in the fifth century before Christ; but the Mahá Bhárata Pándus have nothing to do with this Pándyan kingdom, whose rulers were not Kshetrias, but belonged to the agricultural class. Like the Nairs in Malabar, the Bants and Tulu Gaudas in Canara and the Vokkaligas and Gaudas of Nagara, the Coorgs are—in the brahminical scale—Súdras. The original inhabitants of Coorg were very likely a branch of the cognate South-Indian tribes, and their number may have been augmented by immigrants from the countries just named, who settled at various periods, perhaps under the pressure of national calamities, or attracted by the sheltering forests and fertile soil of Coorg. The now ruined fort Pálpáre five miles to the east of Ponapét in Kiggatnád, is said to have been built by the Béda- or hunter-tribe; the tradition of the Padinalknád Coorgs already na-

[564] [197] 174 167

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

when feeling sure of his position, he imposed upon his followers instead of the voluntary Dhúli-batta (*dusty-grain*) a regular tax of one and a half butty of rice and nine annas eight pies in cash per house per annum. His next step was to call upon the people, in alternate parties to guard his dwelling on the Háleri farm. These watchmen were called *Chaudigara*, a name ever afterwards retained for the Coorg Rájahs' troops. Having openly declared himself and being acknowledged by his adherents ruler of Háleri and of the surrounding Náds, the Padinalknád Karanembáu Náyaka also submitted and so did the others under the condition, that they should receive three-fourths of the revenue and pay one-fourth to the Háleri chief. His increasing power soon threatened the safety of the Coorg Náyakas, who at last were put to death and the whole country brought under the Háleri government.

That the Coorg Rájahs were aliens to the country is evident from the fact, that they were Lingaites, whilst the Coorgs maintained their own crude form of demon- and ancestor-worship and rarely joined the Shivácháries. These are most numerous in north-east Coorg where the people are closely allied with the Mysoreans, and where the influence of the Rájahs was naturally greatest. Again in Padinalknád the Malayálam element seems to be predominant, whilst in Táwnád, Benganád and Surlabimuttanád the Tulu Gaudas and Bants make their influence felt. If a further proof were required to show that the Coorgs are a mixed race, I need only mention, that besides the striking difference in features and colour of the Coorgs, varying between the Caucasian and Mongolian physiognomy and between a fair and dark skin, the house-names also of many Coorg families clearly point to Mysore, Tamil, Malayálam or Tulu origin. Even within the memory of the present generation strangers were received by and incorporated with the Coorgs. There is now a dispute pending about six families in Kiggatnád, who ten years

25: Whitehead M-3 (no date) 1921 AW1 India
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K 782 K [755] cause death, and in these cases only a slight cut is made, usually in the nose or ear of the animal, sufficient to draw a few drops of blood, which are smeared on the tool, as already mentioned. In cases of epidemics, blood is poured over the image of the deity supposed to be responsible for the disease.

C 782 776 *Coorg.* The relic of human sacrifice described above, in Mr. Ramakrishna Row's memorandum, would serve to show that in Mysore such sacrifices, at one time, formed a regular part of the worship of the village deities; and this is confirmed by the account given in the *Mysore and Coorg Manual* by Mr. Lewis Rice[1] of the worship of the grāma-devatā in Coorg, which is a hill country to the west of the Mysore State inhabited by a mixed population consisting of aboriginal tribes, a hundred and twenty thousand cultivators and artisans, who were formerly serfs but are now freemen, and a ruling class of Kodagas or Coorgs, who probably migrated into the country about the third century A.D. He writes:

C •771 782 "The essential features of the religion of the Coorgs are anti-Brāhmanical, and consist of ancestral and demon-worship. As among other Dravidian mountain tribes, so also in Coorg, tradition relates that human sacrifices were offered in former times to secure the favour of their grāma-devatās, Mariamma, Durgā, and Bhadra-Kālī,[2] the tutelary goddesses of the Śakti[3] line, who are supposed to protect the villages or Nāds from all evil influences. In Kirindadu and Koniucheri-Grāma in Katiyet Nād, once every three years, in December and June, a human sacrifice used to be brought to Bhadra-Kālī, and during the offering by the *panikas* (a class of religious mendicants), the people exclaimed 'Al Amma!'—'A man, oh mother!'—but once a devotee shouted 'Al All Amma, Adu!'—'Not a man, oh mother! a goat'; and since that time a he-goat without blemish has been sacrificed.

[1] Vol. iii, pp. 264, 265.
[2] Durgā and Bhadra-Kālī are names of Kālī, the wife of Siva.
[3] See above, p. 29, n. 1.